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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: FOREIGN MINISTER'S INTERVIEW ON LEBANON

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¶1. (U) Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States (i.e., Foreign Minister) gave an interview to Vatican Radio July 27 on the Rome Conference which met July 26 on the Lebanon crisis. The interview was published under the headline, "4 Positive Aspects of Talks on Lebanon: Analysis of Vatican Secretary for Relations With States." Full text of this interview follows in para 2 below.

¶2. (U) Begin text:

VATICAN CITY, JULY 27, 2006 (The 15-nation conference held in Rome on Wednesday failed to produce an immediate cease-fire, but there were significant results, says the Vatican secretary for relations with states. Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo participated as an observer in the international conference, and in this interview aired today on Vatican Radio, he offers his analysis of the meeting.

Q: The international conference for Lebanon was held yesterday, at the initiative of the United States and Italy, in which the Core Group on Lebanon and other countries took part. The Vatican press office announced that a delegation led by you was present in the capacity of observer. Can you explain this?

Archbishop Lajolo: As is known, the Holy See is directly interested in peace in the Middle East, as it has demonstrated on several occasions. Yesterday, at the invitation of the United States and Italy, the Holy See was able to participate in the capacity of observer; by its nature, this is the role with which the Holy See generally participates in international organizations.

Q: What is your judgment on the conference?

Archbishop Lajolo: Of course it is positive that it was called with such speed at the initiative of the Italian government, and that it focused its attention on the most urgent needs of the present time.

Q: The conclusions gathered in the declaration of the two co-presidents, the secretary of state of the United States, Condoleezza Rice, and the Italian minister of foreign affairs, Massimo D'Alema, have been considered rather disappointing. What is your opinion?

Archbishop Lajolo: It's true, the expectations of the public were certainly high, but for the well-informed who understand the difficulties, it could perhaps be said that the results were significant. Above all, I would like to underline these positive aspects: One, the fact that countries from various parts of the world, from Canada to Russia, came together in an awareness of the gravity of what is happening in Lebanon, reaffirming the need for the country to regain full sovereignty as soon as

possible, and that they made a commitment to help her. Two, the request to form an international force, under the mandate of the United Nations, to support the regular Lebanese army in security matters. Three, the commitment to offer immediate humanitarian aid to the people of Lebanon and the guarantee of support in rebuilding by calling a conference of donor states. Several participant countries have anticipated the offer of considerable aid, though it is still insufficient to cover the country's enormous needs. Four, also positive is the commitment adopted by the participants, after the official closing of the conference, to remain in constant contact concerning further developments in the intervention of the international community in Lebanon.

Q: But, what has caused this sense of disappointment?

Archbishop Lajolo: Above all, by the fact that there was no request for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Unanimity among the participants was not achieved because some countries maintained that an appeal would not have produced the desired effect. And it was felt more realistic to express a commitment to achieve without delay a cessation of hostilities, a commitment which can, in fact, be maintained. Another problematic issue was the fact that the conference limited itself to inviting Israel to exercise the greatest restraint. By its nature, this call has a certain inevitable ambiguity, while respect for the innocent civilian population is a precise and binding duty.

Q: What is the judgment of the Lebanese government?

Archbishop Lajolo: On one hand, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora had the opportunity to fully explain the dramatic nature of the situation of the country and to present his own plan for the immediate and definitive resolution of the conflict with Israel. On the other, he was also able to witness and further encourage the positive efforts being made by the international community to help the Lebanese people, to put an end to the conflict and to reinforce his government's control of the country. Yesterday

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evening, Prime Minister Siniora, accompanied by the minister of foreign affairs, Fauzi Salloukh, requested a meeting with the Vatican secretary of state and with me. He expressed great appreciation for the commitment with which the Holy Father in person, and the Holy See, follow the conflict that is racking Lebanon, and he requested continuing support for his country in the international arena. He also recalled Pope John Paul II's words, who defined Lebanon not only as a country, but as "a message" for all peoples of harmonious coexistence among various religions and confessions in one state. This is the historical vocation of the Lebanon, which must be able to be realized. The Holy See will continue to offer all the means at its disposition so that the country will return to be that "garden" of the Middle East, as it was before.

Q: In the capacity of observer, have you had the possibility to influence, at least indirectly, in the works of the conference?

Archbishop Lajolo: An observer does not have the right to speak, and I was not asked. I believe, however, that the silent presence of the observer of the Holy See at the table of the leaders of delegations had a clearly perceptible significance.

Q: After this conference, what is the Holy See's position on this subject?

Archbishop Lajolo: The Holy See remains in favor of an immediate cessation of hostilities. The problems on the table are many and extremely complex, and precisely for that reason cannot all be dealt with together, while bearing in mind the general picture and the overall solution to be achieved, the problems must be resolved "per partes," beginning with those that are immediately resolvable. The position of those who maintain that conditions must first be created so that any truce is not once again violated, is only apparently one of realism, because those

conditions can and must be created with means other than the killing of innocent people. Benedict XVI is close to those peoples, victims of confrontations and of a conflict foreign to them. The Pope prays, and with him the entire Church, for the day of peace to come today and not tomorrow. He prays to God and appeals to political leaders. The Pope weeps with every mother weeping for her children, with all those weeping for their loved ones. An immediate suspension of hostilities is possible, and, therefore, necessary.

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